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MONO.

by John Neil.

WE are indebted to Mrs. Moodie, the poetess for two books she has written on the early days in Ontario: "Roughing it in the Bush" and "Life in the Clearings." Her books are classics and vividly describe the hardships of the early settlers. She was, however, unfortunate in the neighbors she was compelled to associate with; they were not representative of those who laid the foundations of all that is best in the country we love, and of which we are so justly proud.

In the following brief description of Mono, the object is not to give a detailed history, but to give some conception of the character of the men and women who, with strong arms and brave hearts, faced the hardships and dangers of the forest and did so much to make Canada what she is today.

The early settlers of Mono were a fair sample of those who came from the old land to almost all parts of Canada. As far as the writer is aware, the first families who came to what is now Mono Centre were the Turnbulls and Henrys, some of the descendants of whom are still living in the locality. Others soon followed, until in a few years the whole district was fairly settled. Two stories are told of how these two families discovered each other. One is that Mr. Turnbull heard the sound of an axe in the distance. Following the sound and blazing his way so that he would not be lost on his return, he, after walking about three miles, came to a little log cabin and was welcomed by Mr. Henry. The other is that one day one of the boys saw a strange cow in the woods. He followed it until he came to the house of the owner. There is doubt as to which of these stories is the correct one. The fact remains that they found each other.

The difficulties these families had to overcome were many, and in some cases almost insuperable. They however were not accustomed to use the word impossible. It was not to be found in their vocabulary. The dangers were great. The woods were filled with wild beasts. Many stories are told of the attacks to which the people were subjected. The following four incidents, which are absolutely true, will suffice. One night some years after the first settlers had come, a man was returning from a neighbor's house. When he reached the darkest part of the road, he was attacked by a pack of wolves. Fortunately, he had a double barrelled gun with him—no one then dreamt of going any distance from home without taking firearms

with him. He fired on the wolves and then reloaded his gun, but they came nearer and nearer. He had not time to load with anything but powder. At last they came so near that he could feel their hot breath and could see their glaring eyeballs and their shining fangs. He had almost given up in despair when a light appeared in the distance and he saw men coming with a lantern. As soon as the wolves saw the light, they fled. A woman returning home through the woods one night heard the growling of some wild animal. She climbed a tree and remained there until morning. On another occassion a man was carrying a little pig in a bag. The pig was squealing as a protest against the manner in which it was being treated. A bear which had a taste for fresh pork made its appearance. The man dropped the pig and climbed a tree, and remained there until the morning. The pig has not recorded its experiences. A relative of the writer one night was alone in her little cabin, her husband being absent. She heard a lynx on the roof, and lest it should come down the large chimney, she sat up all night keeping the fire burning. These are only samples of what were common occurrances.

The clearing of the forest required perseverance and determination. The first settlers had come from the old land, and the life they entered on was very different from anything they had experienced in the past. They had come to a new world. They had first to build a little log cabin, most primitive in its structure, consisting usually of two rooms, one a bedroom, the other kitchen, dining room and parlor all in one. The story is told of one case where a woman came a year after her husband. When she saw where they were to live her heart sank within her. She had come from a comfortable home in Scotland. But she said, "I was willing to live in a hollow log if I could hae Jamie wi' me." After the house was erected came the clearing of the forest. In the late autumn, before the snow fell, the underbrush was cleared away and piled in heaps ready to burn in the spring. When this was done, the giant trees were attacked. Unaccustomed as they were to the axe, this was at first discouraging work. Soon however they acquired skill, not only in wielding the axe, but were able to direct their blows so that they could cause the tree to fall in the very place desired. The tree when felled was stripped of its branches and the trunk cut in lengths of ten or twelve feet. When spring came and the brush was dry and the wind blowing in the right direction, the brush heaps were lighted and in an incredibly short space of time the fiire had swept over the whole cleared space, leaving

only the large logs. Then came the logging bees. When the population had increased so that they could have a logging bee, the neighbors would unite together. Four or five yokes of oxen would be brought. Three men were alloted to each team, one to drive, two to pile the logs one upon another when brought to the proper place. An equal strip was set apart for each team. Then came the race, as to which should reach the other end first, and no football or baseball game was ever more keenly contested. Even the oxen seemed to enter on the race with as much zest as the men. At that time the words "total abstinence" or "prohibition" were unknown, and one man, usually too old to work, was set apart as grog boss. When they had reached the end of the field, he would treat each of the men, giving to those who had won an extra glass After the logs had all been piled in heaps, the burning began, and much timber which would be considered very valuable now, but for which there was no market then, was destroyed.

Next came the preparation of the soil for the seed. This was no easy matter, as the stumps were thick and the plough was continually coming in contact with the roots underneath the ground. The soil was however virgin soil and fertile, and as a rule an abundant harvest was the result of all this labor. Especially was this true of potatoes. Never were there larger or more mealy potatoes than those which grew on the land which had just been cleared. The grain when ripe was cut at first with a sickle, afterwards with cradles. There were no self-binders in those days. Even if they had been in existence, they would have been useless in those stumpy fields. Then came the threshing, at first with the flail, afterwards with the horse power threshing machine. When thrashed it was taken to the market. At first the nearest market was Toronto, (then called Little York) fifty miles distant. Frequently, before there were regular roads, men were obliged to carry half a bag of wheat on their shoulders and return with the groceries they had obtained in exchange. We talk of hard work. These early settlers could tell us what hard work meant.

Sometimes serious accdents would happen. A tree on one occasion fell on the house of the first settler and crushed the roof. The owner of the house was in despair, and declared he would go back to the country he had left. His wife said, "We are here and shall remain here." She caught up the axe and started to remore the tree. This gave her husband fresh courage. He took the axe from her hand and soon the damage was repaired. Wood fires at times caused serious destruction.

McLauchlin, the Canadian poet, has described such a fire, where in a few minutes the labor of years was swept away.

The question has often been asked, what kind of schools had they in those days. At first of course they had none, but before long they were able to unite together and build a schoolhouse and hire a teacher. The school which the writer attended was built of logs with a large wood fireplace at one end. In the morning a large back log would be rolled in and other pieces of wood piled around it. A bright fire which kept the room warm all day was then lighted. The desks were attached to the walls on each side, and the scholars sat with their backs to the teacher. The teachers received very small salaries, and they "boarded round", as it was called, remaining in one home for two weeks, then two weeks in another. They were not as a rule very learned, and would not be able today to obtain a certificate. Nor were their methods very modern. There was however one thing; the school books were excellent. We had the Irish National Series. The selections were chosen from our best literature. They were more definitely religious than they are now. There were many passages from both the Old and New Testament, and one of the readers contained a complete summary of Old Testament history. The teachers in those days believed in the scriptural injunction "not to spare the rod." The numbers of beech trees around the school building provided all the material necessary for that element of education. Corporal punishment is not as general now as then, and perhaps it is just as well, but there is a question as to whether satisfactory substitutes have been provided. The story is told of a prominent politician whose first name was Duncan. He was giving a public address on one occasion and was condemning corporal punishment. In the course of his remarks, he said, "I was never whipped but once in school, and that time it was for telling the truth." A Highlander back in the audience called out, "Duncan, it cured ye." The daughter of that politician assures the writer that that story is true.

After a time, other means of acquiring knowledge were provided. A number of families in the district were exceptionly intelligent and not only had in their homes good books, but they formed a public library and books of fiction and history were placed within the reach of all, and the long winter evenings gave to those who desired opportunities for reading. Debating societies were organized and some who have since entered law, the ministry or politics, made their maiden speeches in these societies. There were no daily papers at first,

and comparatively few received the weekly paper. A number of men however would assemble in the post office on Saturday night. One would read, the others would listen, and at times interject remarks. When the paper was read frequently a discussion would be started which would occassionally continue until "The Wee, Sma' Hours Ayont the Twal." The blacksmith's shop was also a place of resort. Blacksmiths have been proverbially men of intelligence and ours was no exception to the rule. And there not only horseshoes, ploughshares and coulters were fashioned, but the affairs of church and state were settled to the satisfaction of the majority of those present. The two political parties — for there were only two in those days—were represented, and feeling ran high during elections. The voting was open and from hour to hour the state of the poll was known. The Liberals claimed to be able to hold their own: n argument, but on election day they were in a hopeless minority when the votes were counted. Sometimes those opposed to each other were not satisfied with the tongue as a weapon, but fists were employed to give force to the argument. The blows and knocks were not always apostolic.

The MacKenzie rebellion did not pass unnoticed in that then remote district. The feeling became intense and the man who was suspected of having any sympathy with MacKenzie was for the time being an outcast. There were those who, while in accord with the principles MacKenzie advocated, did not believe in his methods. The story is told of one who shouldered his gun and started out to oppose the rebellion. When about to leave his mother, a kind-hearted old Aberdeenshire woman, said to him, "John, dinna shoot onybody until he shoot you." She was not permitted to forget that for some time.

The religious life of the community was not neglected. Some of the early settlers were deeply religious. They were chiefly men from Scotland and the north of Ireland and were, with a few exceptions, Presbyterians. At first, services were held in private houses, or in the summer under the shelter of some spreading birch or maple. After a time a church was erected at Mono Centre and another farther west. The church at the Centre was a very plain building, and would not seat more then eighty or ninety people. The pulpit was high, a number of steps leading up to it. There was a sounding board over the head of the minister, and at the foot of the pulpit, yet part of it, a place for the precentor. There was of course no choir or organ or hymns in those early days, only Psalms and para-

phrases. One or two looked even with suspicion on the paraphrases. The worshippers stood in prayer and sat to sing. The sermons were not short, nor were the prayers. An hour was considered the proper length of the sermon; no twenty minute sermonettes then. There were a number who claimed to be theologians amongst the hearers. If the minister deviated in the slightest from the beaten path marked out by the Confession of Faith and the Shorter Catechism, he would soon be reminded of the heresy in which he had indulged. The ministers may not have been always eloquent, but as a rule they were men of earnest piety, and self-sacrificing spirit. They were in many cases men of Old World culture who were graduates of Old Country universities. They were leaders in laying the foundations of our educational system, and had a refining influence on the community. One defect as we look back upon the past, was that in the Sabbath service they did not sufficiently recognize the needs of the young. Notwithstanding all this, as one looks back upon the past, next to the home there are no associations as sacred as those connected with that little church.

In those days no one dreamt of prohibition. There were several places where liquor was sold. At all public gatherings, such as threshings, logging bees, marriages and even funerals, liquor was present, and the man who did not supply it was looked upon as inhospitable and spoken of as mean. Mono was in this respect in no sense different from other parts of Canada. Over fifty years ago, however, temperance societies were formed, and for the last forty years Mono has been one of the banner townships in temperance reform.

The amusements in which young people engaged were of a simple character. In connection with threshings, apple paring bees, and so forth, there would usually be a dance, and always in connection with a wedding. The dances consisted largely of four and eight hand reels, lancers, heel and toe polkas, Sir Roger de Coverly. They would have been shocked even to witness some of the dances which are so popular to-day. In winter, sleigh drives were very frequent. On clear moonlight or starlight nights, the young people would form surprise parties, taking with them provisions and spending a couple of hours at a house some distance away. It would be difficult to conceive of anything more delightful than those drives—the merry voices, songs, laughter, the sound of the sleigh runners on the crisp snow, and the music of the bells.

"Bells, bells,
What a world of merriment their melody foretells.
How they tinkle, tinkle, tinkle in the icy air of night,
Whilst the stars that oversprinkle
All the Heavens seem to twinkle
With a chrystalline delight,
To the music of the bells."

No one who has ever been privileged when young to enjoy one of these drives can ever forget it.

The young people's intercourse with each other was free and unconstrained. They looked on each other as one family.

There was at that time more marked individuality than there is to day. There were a number of characters in the community. One man was looked upon as the wit of the country-side, and his humorous remarks were continually being quoted, except by those who were the subjects of his sometimes caustic witticisms. Another was looked upon as the philosopher of the district, and his opinions were often regarded as being sufficient to settle a disputed question. Another was in special favour as a story teller. He had visited many countries and had witnessed and taken part in many stirring scenes. It was suspected that frequently he depended more on his imagination than his experiences for the tales he unfolded. One was an old Waterloo veteran who had been all through the Peninsular war and never received a wound. On one occasion when on his way to Toronto to receive his pension, he remained over night with a friend. He was examining a gun, not knowing it was loaded. It suddenly exploded and its contents lodged in his thigh. In his case peace proved more disastrous than war.

Some of the people, especially those who came from the Old Land, were superstitious and had all sorts of ghost and fairy stories to tell, which they believed, and the boys and girls believed as firmly as they did the Bible. And he was considered a brave man who would go through a graveyard at night alone. One dark night the writer was going home from the church. A man had committed suicide that day. When the writer came to a specially dark part of the road, and was expecting every moment to meet the suicide, he suddenly fell over something. There was a rush on every side of him. For a moment he believed that all the inhabitants of the graveyard were upon him. He found, however, that he was in the midst of a flock of sheep, and he had fallen over one lying on the road. All were not superstitious, however. One man had a wife who ruled him sternly. She died suddenly. The night after her death, one

of his neighbors wished to remain with him. He said, "No, I am not nearly as much afraid of her to-night as I was a week ago, when she was alive and well."

Mono has changed since those days. The farms are all cleared and are well cultivated. The log houses are gone, and stone and brick have taken their places. The ox teams are no longer seen. Motor cars are owned by many of the farmers. The self-binder has taken the place of the cradle. Organs and pianos are in most of the houses. Many things are different, but the physical features of many parts of the country are the same. The western part of the township is level and fertile. No better cultivated farms are to be found anywhere. The east is wonderfully picturesque, high hills, deep valleys and glens and rocks, and running streams of water finding their way to the Nottawa River, which finds its way to the Georgian Bay. It is a country which all visitors view with delight, and which those who lived there, when young, regard as one of the most beautiful spots on earth.

Mono Centre is still and always will be a small hamlet. It is in a valley open to the south and east, with hills in the near distance. On the west it is sheltered and confined by a long, high, steep rock, on the north by a densely wooded glen. The old church still remains on the hill above, with the silent city of the dead beside it.

Many of those who were boys and girls fifty years ago are no longer there. Some have passed from this earthly scene. Some have gone to the north west, and with scarcely an exception are loyal to all that is best in the life of that new land. Some have entered the ministry, law, medicine or commercial life. Many still remain and are building on the foundations their fathers and mothers laid.

Mono has no reason to be ashamed of her past. God grant that she may develop a noble future, and when asked what does she produce, say, as a native of Highland glen said, "Men."

This is written in beautiful Southern California, but the writer, who has had the privilege of visiting many countries, finds that the older he becomes the more his heart warms to the home of his birth.

John Gill

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